

reflects upon me and all of us. I suppose it wasn't about South America you wanted to see him?"

I could not lie to a lady.

"Dear me! That is his most dangerous subject. You won't believe a word he says—I'm sure I don't wonder. But don't tell him so, for it makes him very violent. Pretend to believe him, and you may get through all right. Remember, he believes it himself. Of that you may be assured. A more honest man never lived. Don't wait any longer, or he may suspect. If you find him dangerous, really dangerous, ring the bell and hold him off until I come. Even at his worst, I can usually control him."

WITH these encouraging words the lady handed me over to the taciturn Austin, who had waited like a bronze statue of Discretion during our short interview, and I was conducted to the end of the passage. There was a tap at a door, a bull's bellow from within, and I was face to face with the professor.

He sat in a rotating chair behind a broad table, which was covered with books, maps, and diagrams. As I entered, his seat spun round to face me.

His appearance made me gasp. I was prepared for something strange, but not for so overpowering a personality as this. It was his size which took one's breath away, his size and his imposing presence. His head was enormous, the largest I have ever seen upon a human being. I am sure that his top hat, had I ever ventured to don it, would have slipped over me entirely, and rested on my shoulders. He had the face and beard which I associate with an Assyrian bull; the former florid, the latter so black as almost to have a suspicion of blue, spade shaped and rippling down over his chest. The hair was peculiar, plastered down in front in a long, curving wisp over his massive forehead. The eyes were blue-gray under great black tufts, very clear, very critical, and very masterful. A huge spread of shoulders and a chest like a barrel were the other parts of him which appeared above the table, save for two enormous hands covered with long black hair. This, and a bellowing, roaring, rumbling voice, made up my first impression of the notorious Professor Challenger.

"Well?" said he, with a most insolent stare. "What now?"

I must keep up my deception for at least a little time longer; otherwise here was evidently an end of the interview. "You were good enough to give me an appointment, Sir," said I humbly, producing his envelop.

He took my letter from his desk, and laid it out before him. "Oh, you are the young person who cannot understand plain English, are you? My general conclusions you are good enough to approve, as I understand?"

"Entirely, Sir, entirely!" I was very emphatic.

"Dear me! That strengthens my position very much, does it not? Your age and appearance make your support doubly valuable. Well, at least you are better than that herd of swine in Vienna, whose gregarious grunt is, however, not more offensive than the isolated effort of the British hog." He glared at me as the present representative of the beast.

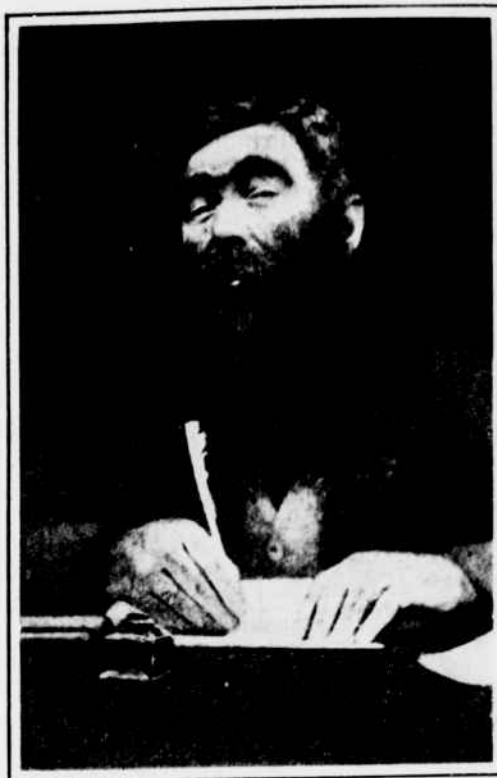
"They seem to have behaved abominably," said I.

"I assure you that I can fight my own battles, and that I have no possible need of your sympathy. Put me alone, Sir, and with my back to the wall. G. E. C. is happiest then. Well, Sir, let us do what we can to curtail this visit, which can hardly be agreeable to you, and is inexpressibly irksome to me. You have, as I have been led to believe, some comments to make upon the proposition which I advanced in my thesis."

There was a brutal directness about his methods which made evasion difficult. I must still make play and wait for a better opening. It had seemed simple enough at a distance. Oh, my Irish wits! Could they not help me now when I needed help so sorely?

He transfixed me with two sharp, steely eyes. "Come! Come!" he rumbled.

"I am, of course, a mere student," said I, with a fatuous smile; "hardly more, I might say, than an earnest inquirer. At the



Professor Challenger in His Study.

same time, it seemed to me that you were a little severe upon Weissmann in this matter. Has not the general evidence since that date tended to—well, to strengthen his position?"

"What evidence?" He spoke with a menacing calm.

"Well, of course, I am aware that there is not any what you might call definite evidence. I allude merely to the trend of modern thought and the general scientific point of view, if I might so express it."

He leaned forward with great earnestness. "I suppose you are aware," said he, checking off points upon his fingers, "that the cranial index is a constant factor?"

"Naturally," said I.

"And that telegony is still *sub judice*?"

"Undoubtedly."

"And that the germ plasm is different from the parthenogenetic egg?"

"Why, surely," I cried, and gloried in my own audacity.

"But what does that prove?" he asked in a gentle, persuasive voice.

"Ah, what indeed?" I murmured. "What does it prove?"

"Shall I tell you?" he cooed.

"Pray do."

"It proves," he roared with a blast of sudden fury, "that you are the damndest impostor in London,—a vile, crawling journalist, who has no more science than he has decency in his composition!"

HE had sprung to his feet with a mad rage in his eyes. Even at that moment of tension I found time for amazement at the discovery that he was quite a short man, his head not higher than my shoulder,—a stunted Hercules whose tremendous vitality had all run to depth, breadth, and brain.

"Gibberish!" he cried, leaning forward, with his fingers on the table and his face projecting. "That's what I have been talking to you, Sir—scientific gibberish! Did you think you could match cunning with me, you with your walnut of a brain? You think you are omnipotent, you infernal scribblers, don't you? That your praise can make a man and your blame can break him? We must all bow to you, and try to get a favorable word, must we? This man shall have a leg up, and this man shall have a dressing down—creeping vermin, I know you! You've got out of your station. Time was when your ears were clipped. You've lost your sense of proportion. Swollen gas bags! I'll keep you in your proper place! Yes, Sir, you haven't got over G. E. C! There's one man who is still your



"After All, What Do I Know about Your Honor?" Said He.